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THE CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLISM IN LANGUAGE.

BY- LAFFAL, JULIUS

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A TECHNIQUE OF ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLISM IS PRESENTED, BASED ON THE IDEA THAT WORDS WHICH APPEAR IN CLOSE ASSOCIATION IN THE SPEECH OR WRITING OF AN INDIVIDUAL ARE PSYCHOLOGICALLY CLOSELY RELATED. THE LATENT MEANING, OR SYMBOLISM, OF A WORD IS ELUCIDATED BY SHOWING HOW CLOSE IT IS, CONCEPTUALLY, TO OTHER SELECTED WORDS OR THEMES IN THE INDIVIDUAL'S LANGUAGE. A TECHNIQUE, "THE ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTUAL ASSOCIATES," IS BASED ON THESE CONCEPTS. IF ONE TOOK A KEY WORD AND ABSTRACTED LIMITED VERBAL CONTEXTS SURROUNDING IT WHEREVER IT APPEARED, ONE WOULD HAVE A MATRIX OF CONTEXTS IN CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE KEY WORD. THESE CONTEXTS WOULD PROVIDE A PICTURE OF THE KINDS OF IDEAS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE KEY WORD. THE AUTHOR DISCUSSED THIS TECHNIQUE AS APPLIED TO THE WRITING OF DANIEL PAUL SCHREBER, A PROMINENT JUDGE IN GERMANY IN THE 19TH CENTURY, WHICH HAD CAUSED SOME CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THOSE USING FREUDIAN ANALYSIS AND THOSE WITH DIFFERENT OPINIONS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE (133D, WASHINGTON, D.C., DECEMBER 29, 1966). (RS)

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Julius Laffal

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Subject.....The Contextual Analysis of Symbolism in Language.
Author.....Julius Laffal, Ph.D., Director of Research, Psychology Service, V. A. Hospital, West Haven, Conn. & Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology (Psychiatry), Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
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A technique of analysis of symbolism is presented, based on the idea that words which appear in close association in the speech or writing of an individual are psychologically closely related. In this contextual analysis, words are taken as tokens representing concepts, and it is the concepts rather than the words themselves that are examined for the ideational domain surrounding a key item. Words are translated into concepts by use of a conceptual dictionary of English which assigns all the common words of English to one or two of 114 possible concepts. The fact that it is possible to reduce the words of English to a limited number of dimensions with reasonable inter-judge agreement, is in itself an important datum about human cognitive processes and language, and the system of concepts may be seen as a network of cognitive points within which individuals define their world and which in turn may be used to define particular symbols. Frequency profiles of concepts surrounding separate key items may be compared with each other to show how closely related are the separate key items in the individual's cognition. The latent meaning, or symbolism, of a word is elucidated by showing how close it is, conceptually, to other selected words or themes in the individual's language.

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The Contextual Analysis of Symbolism in Language[1]

Julius Laffal

Veterans Administration Hospital, West Haven, Connecticut

and

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Language played an important role in Freud's thinking about unconscious and conscious phenomena. His fundamental proposition about language was that "...the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone."[2] However, when we think of dream language and schizophrenic speech, we see that the "presentation of the word," may be either under secondary process control or primary process control. Language under secondary process control is rational language, a consensually valid event in which a particular word is experienced in common by members of the community as referring to a particular set of events or particular "presentation of the thing." In language under primary process control, some important aspect of the individual's experience to which the word is joined is not that commonly experienced by others in connection with the word. The word carries a common manifest meaning, but also a hidden, latent meaning for the individual which is uniquely his and not commonly shared. This discordance between manifest and latent meaning raises the possibility of symbolism.

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[1] Paper presented at The Joint Sessions of the AAAS and The Academy of Psychoanalysis, The Society for General Systems Research and The American Political Science Association; Topic: Symbolism, Section II, Washington, D. C., December, 1966.

[2] Freud, S. The unconscious (1915). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. London: Hogarth Press, 1953 (p. 201).

I would define symbolism in language as a verbalization where the words consistently carry a latent meaning for the subject different from their common, manifest meaning. Such a definition of symbolism predicates primary process, that is, a non-consensual relationship between the word and the latent meaning, but also that the relationship between word and latent meaning is a durable one for the individual.

This idea of symbolism, or perhaps, idiosyncratic symbolism, is somewhat different from the idea of symbolism developed by Jones,[3] which stresses the universality of the symbol. The kind of symbolism that Jones, and Freud as well, described, is a hidden universal language, in which all members of a community share the latent meaning of the symbol, but are not conscious of it. Idiosyncratic symbolism, the symbolism belonging uniquely to an individual, is that in which particular items -- in the present case, verbalizations -- have a hidden but consistent meaning for the individual, different from the common meaning shared by the individual's community.

The problem for research is how to get at or make manifest, these hidden, symbolic meanings. In the present paper I wish to describe a method of analyzing verbal contexts, which may be capable of demonstrating hidden meanings of particular key words of an individual.

The technique of analysis, which I have called the "analysis of contextual associates," is based on the idea that words which appear in close association in the speech or writing of an individual, are psychologically closely related. If one took a key word and abstracted limited verbal contexts surrounding it wherever it appeared, one would have a matrix of contexts in close association with the key word. These contexts could provide a picture of the kinds of ideas closely associated with the key word. Psychoanalysts, when they seek to determine the latent meaning of a word

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[3]Jones, E. The theory of symbolism. In Papers on psycho-analysis. New York: William Wood, 1923.

or an idea, ask the patient to associate to it, and define the latent meaning by the kinds of associations which emerge. The compilation of contexts around a key item also explores the associations of the key item, that is, the words which are uttered in close conjunction with the key item.

In this contextual analysis, words are taken as tokens representing concepts, and it is the concepts rather than the words themselves that are examined for the ideational domain around the key item. The contextual analysis shows to what extent the various concepts which accompany the key item are stressed, by simple frequency count of occurrence of the concepts as represented by word tokens. Frequency profiles of concepts belonging to separate key items may be compared with each other, to learn how closely related are the separate key items in the individual's cognition.

Before going on to illustrate this method in an analysis of material from the autobiography of the famous patient, Daniel Paul Schreber, I will say a little about the translation of words into concepts. When I began this work about eight years ago, I tried to compare the contexts of key words by simply listing sets of words around the key items. The English language contains so many individual tokens with related or similar meanings, it quickly became obvious that such comparisons could only operate by abstracting from the word meanings themselves, to concepts represented by the words. In the course of this work I developed a conceptual dictionary which assigns all the common words of English to one or two of 114 possible concepts. The fact that it is possible to reduce the words of English to a limited number of dimensions with reasonable inter-judge agreement, is in itself an important datum about human cognitive processes and language. I believe it a fair hypothesis that categories of language derived in the manner I am describing may tell us about human experiential possibilities, and that the system of categories is at least a suggestion of a network of cognitive points within which individuals define their world.

Although in the study to be described we used hand categorization of words, we have since moved on to computer categorization. After an editor has prepared a text to be analyzed, the text is cardpunched and compared by computer to a stored category dictionary. The computer assigns categories to words matched with the dictionary, and produces a profile of the distribution of categories, showing how many times each of the 114 categories has occurred in the sample analyzed. Category profiles may then be compared to each other by correlation, which in turn shows how close or how discrepant any pair of profiles may be. What kinds of concepts surround a key item are shown by what categories are stressed in the profile.

An important consideration in the development of the present category system was that the scheme provide an adequate basis, at the very least, for discriminating the language of one speaker from that of another. This meant that every category in the scheme had to contribute to such potential. Such a requirement militates against categories which are heavily loaded with words from everyone's speech and against categories which rarely contribute a token to anyone's speech. Global categories such as "animate" and "inanimate" -- which sometimes appear in linguistic conceptual schemes -- provide little basis for discriminating between the word predilections of separate speakers, since they contribute large numbers of tokens to everyone's speech. On the other hand, there are few words which refer to spatial "right" and "left." The usefulness of such discriminations in a psychologically oriented analysis of language is therefore limited.

Words from many language samples were bundled on the basis of synonymy, similarity of meaning, or relatedness of reference, and groupings of words began to define themselves. Where a category turned out to be very large compared to other categories, what was also readily apparent was some basis for splitting the category along one or more lines to produce more limited categories. And where a category turned out to have few separate words compared to other categories, it was possible to merge it with another neighboring category whose domain of reference then swelled to include the new meaning.

An important criterion which entered into the development of categories is related to ideas of reliability and validity. The categories of reference in a scheme of language must be sufficiently discriminable from each other so that separate judges considering a word will be in agreement as to which category is involved. If the categories are too closely related this will be a difficult judgment and an unreliable one. To the extent that it is unreliable, its validity, its pertinence to other behavior is dubious. Distinctiveness of reference of each category was therefore an important desideratum.

The cognitive-conceptual scheme which emerged from this bundling of words, is full implicitly of the temporal-spatial-motor experiences of man, of his bodily presence in the world. Thus beginning, ending, changing, enduring and time, fastness, slowness, nearness, farness, in, out, up, down, forward, back, big, little, hard, soft, going, resting, joining and separating are significant categories in the system, as are body features and body functions, food, dirt, cleanliness, illness and health.

Beside the spatial, quantitative and temporal aspects of experience which are well represented in language, certain other groupings of words emerge. Loving, hating, happiness, anxiety, and needs, have numerous words in the language, as do more intellectual qualities related to absurdities, ambiguities, problems, simplicity, truth, falsehood, importance, familiarity, unfamiliarity, negation, cognition, learning, knowledge, and communication. In addition, interpersonal relations bearing on dominance, submission, helping, hurting, being alone or in a group, giving, and getting are well represented in language.

Words relating to certain concrete aspects of the world also appear to conglomerate in the language in such a manner as to fit the requirements of relatedness, size and discriminability. Such are: the animal world, weather, space, astronomical matters, earth and ground, materials and substances of all sorts, bodies of water, and vegetation.

Words pertaining to certain products and activities of man have a similar distinctiveness: clothing, money, commerce and business, household furnishings, mechanical devices, transportation, and work. In the realm of value there are many words relating to crime, law, religion, good and bad.

One of the features of the category system is the possibility of locating a given word in more than one dimension. In the sentence "Birds fly," categories referring to animals and heights would apply to the word birds, and in locating fly in the system, both height and movement would be important. Practical considerations at present permit only two categories for any word, but in some instances three or four categories might better define a word.

There are many words which defy classification, except within a given context. Such are words like make, do, put, take, pull, throw. Where certain standard contexts may be described which give explicit meaning to these words, they may be categorized. However, it is impossible to capture the meaning of these words divorced of specific context. The same problem is present in many words which partake of so many dimensions of meaning that only an arbitrary choice may assign them to a limited number of categories. One has to decide whether to leave a word out of the system or to capture at least something of its meaning -- even if not all.

Over the years, as samples of language from various sources were analyzed, with a continuing effort to fit new words into existing groups or to redefine the word groups to make them more congruent with word meanings, a dictionary of words with their appropriate categories began to emerge.

Table 1 provides an alphabetical listing of heading words in the 114 categories[4] -- some of which have already been mentioned -- of the conceptual scheme. These heading words are simply key words in each category, rather than descriptive of the categories themselves. The category system may be regarded as a

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[4] The categories are described in detail in Laffal, J. Pathological and normal language. New York: Atherton Press, 1965.

conceptual grid to be laid upon a language sample in order to reveal the density of the various concepts in that sample. In no sense is this system a final or a best system, and a study of the words in each category will reveal that the placement of some words is more arbitrary than inevitable. But the system has worked in various studies, and is, in my estimation, relevant to psychological variables which we may wish to examine.

To demonstrate this I will describe the application of the category analysis technique to symbolism in the writing of Daniel Paul Schreber who provided us with an autobiographical account of his religious delusions. I will not go into details of the study which are available in a published paper,[5] but I present it as paradigmatic of an objective approach to the analysis of symbolism in language.

Daniel Paul Schreber was a doctor of jurisprudence and a prominent judge in Germany at the end of the last century, who, after becoming psychotic, published an account of his delusions in the belief that he was making a contribution of value to science and the knowledge of religious truths. He believed that God sought to unman him and transform him miraculously into a woman for the purpose of creating new human beings. On the basis of Schreber's memoirs, without having known Schreber personally, Freud[6] undertook to trace the etiology of Schreber's delusions, and formulated his well known theory of homosexuality and projection in paranoia. Macalpine and Hunter,[7] who published an English translation of Schreber's autobio-

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[5] Laffal, J. The contextual associates of sun and God in Schreber's autobiography. J. abnorm. soc. Psychol., 1960, 61, 474-479.

[6] Freud, S. Psychoanalytic notes upon an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia (dementia paranoides) (1911). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.

[7] Macalpine, Ida, & Hunter, R. A. Discussion of the Schreber case. In Daniel Paul Schreber: Memoirs of my nervous illness. Cambridge, Mass.: Robert Bentley, 1955.

graphy disagreed with Freud's homosexual interpretation of Schreber's delusions, and maintained that a wish for ambisexuality and self-contained procreative powers was at the root of Schreber's illness. In line with this, they contested Freud's account of the symbolism of the sun as father in Schreber's delusions, and argued that the sun had feminine connotations as well for Schreber. A theoretical issue bearing on the symbolism of the sun in Schreber's writing was thus clearly posed. Freud on one side, and Macalpine and Hunter on the other, argued their positions to a large extent from general considerations of mythology, other clinical cases, and language. Macalpine and Hunter, for example, pointed out that the sun is of feminine gender in German, although it may have masculine gender in other languages, thus claiming support for their idea that it has both feminine and masculine connotations. But Schreber's writing itself offers the possibility of an internal analysis, using contextual associates, which might demonstrate the idiosyncratic symbolism of the sun for the writer.

If Schreber used the same concepts in writing of the sun as he did in writing of father figures, this could be taken as evidence that his associations to the two were alike and that, in effect, they meant the same thing to him, as Freud asserted. If, on the other hand, Schreber wrote about the sun the way he wrote about women, this could be taken as evidence for the Macalpine and Hunter view that the sun had important feminine aspects for Schreber. The problem posed was to compare the contexts of the sun and various other key words in Schreber's autobiography in order to determine their relative similarity to each other.

Unfortunately, the third chapter of Schreber's autobiography, which dealt intimately with members of his family, was deleted from the work by official censorship, so that there are practically no references to Schreber's father in the book. This makes a direct comparison of language related to father with language related to the sun impossible. However, there are some indirect ways of approaching the problem. It is clear that Freud believed God was the father figure par excellence

for Schreber. Macalpine and Hunter do not accept this view and, consistently with their position about the sun, maintain that Freud ignored the female significance of God also. Some fairly definite predictions arise from these differences of view.

If Freud's contention that the sun and God were both father symbols for Schreber is correct, there ought to be a similarity in the way Schreber wrote about both of these, and both ought to be more similar to the way Schreber wrote about male figures than to the way he wrote about female figures.

If the Macalpine and Hunter view is correct, then there ought also to be a strong similarity between the way Schreber wrote about the sun and God, but how he wrote of both of these ought to be similar to the way he wrote of females.

Freud maintained, in addition, that Dr. Flechsig, Schreber's physician, was the subject of the patient's homosexual longings. In this sense both God and Dr. Flechsig stood as dominant male figures in relation to Schreber. If Freud is correct, there ought to be a strong relationship in the way Schreber wrote about Flechsig and about God, and both of these ought to be more strongly related to the way Schreber wrote about males than the way he wrote about females. Macalpine and Hunter are not specific in interpreting the symbolism of Dr. Flechsig in Schreber's psychology, but they appear to suggest also some element of identity with God.

In the contextual analysis, contexts from Schreber's autobiography, as translated by Macalpine and Hunter, which contained only one of the words sun, God, or Flechsig, or one male or female reference, were marked for transcription. A context was defined as a sequence containing only one key word, beginning three lines before a line containing the key word and ending three lines after a line containing the key word. A roughly equivalent number of such contexts was taken out for each key word. It happens that the word sun occurs alone least often in the autobiography, and the total number of contexts available for sun was used to determine the number of contexts selected for each of the other key words, since it was desired to have approximately equal numbers of categorized words in the ultimate

comparisons. The words in the various contexts of the key words were categorized using an early version of the category system described. The profiles showing frequency of occurrence of the various categories then became the basis for comparison of key words. These profiles were matched with each other by correlation, and the correlations were compared with each other to determine which pair of profiles was more alike.

The findings, in brief, were that the contexts of God in Schreber's autobiography were more like the contexts of male than of female; similarly, the contexts of Flechsig and male were more similar than those of Flechsig and female. With respect to the symbolism of the sun, contexts of female and of sun were more highly related than those of male and sun, the data thus lending support to the Macalpine and Hunter view that the sun has feminine symbolism in the autobiography. An interesting finding was that the correlation between profiles of God and sun were rather low, calling into question the assumption by Freud as well as by Macalpine and Hunter that the sun and God symbolized the same thing for Schreber.

This study of Schreber's writing was an early one in the development of the category analysis technique, going back before 1960, and has many drawbacks as a study. I have presented it here to show the possibility of applying the technique of analysis of concepts in contextual associates to problems of symbolism, where a significant theoretical issue may be involved. I believe this is a beginning in the direction content analyses will take in the study of what a word, or, for that matter, a gesture or an act accompanied by words, may symbolize in the psychology of the individual; for beside the objectivity of such an approach, it may in fact be drawing upon the fundamental cognitive-experiential possibilities of the individual as reflected in the concepts underlying his language.

Table 1

Alphabetic Listing of Categories by Heading Word

ABSURD
AGREE 1 (SYMPATHY)
AGREE 2 (AGREEMENT)
AGREE 3 (SIMILARITY)
ALL 1 (WHOLE)
ALL 2 (MUCH)
ALL 3 (FREQUENT)
ANIMAL
ART
ASTRONOMY 1 (SPACE)
ASTRONOMY 2 (WEATHER)
BACK
BAD
BEGIN
BIG
BLURRED
CALM
CHANGE
CLEAN
CLOTHING
COLD
COLOR
COMMERCE
CONFINE
CONFLICT 1 (HARM)
CONFLICT 2 (HATE)
CONFLICT 3 (DISAGREE)
CRIME
CURE
DEAD
DIFFICULT
DIRTY
DOMINANCE 1 (STRONG)
DOMINANCE 2 (LEAD)
DOWN
DRINK
DURABLE
EARTH
EASY
EAT
END
ESSENTIAL
FALSE
FAR
FAST
FEATURE (BODY)
FEMALE
FORWARD
FUNCTION (BODY)
GO
GOOD
GROUP
HAPPENING
HEAR
HELP
HILL
HOLLOW 1 (DWELLINGS)
HOLLOW 2 (OBJECTS)
HOT
HOUSEHOLD
ILLNESS
IN
INDIVIDUAL
JOIN
LANGUAGE 1 (SPEAK)
LANGUAGE 2 (WRITE)
LAW
LITTLE
LIVING
MALE
MATERIAL
MEASUREMENT
MECHANISM
MONEY
NEAR
NEGATION
NUMBER
OPEN
OUT
PLACE
PLAY
POSSESS
REASON 1 (COGNITION)
REASON 2 (EDUCATION)
REASON 3 (SCIENCE)
SACRED
SEA
SEE
SELF-REFERENCE
SEPARATE
SEX
SHARP 1 (SHARP)
SHARP 2 (EMPHASIS)
SLOW
SOME
STRUCTURE
SUBMISSION 1 (WEAK)
SUBMISSION 2 (INFERIOR)
TIME 1 (PAST)
TIME 2 (PRESENT)
TIME 3 (FUTURE)
TIME 4 (GENERAL TIME)
TRANSPORTATION
TRIVIAL 1 (UNIMPORTANCE)
TRIVIAL 2 (DE-EMPHASIS)
TRUE
UNREAL
UP
UPSET
VEGETATION
WANT 1 (NEED)
WANT 2 (ABSENCE)
WORK
YOUNG

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